

PLANNING BOARD & PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2008

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the land use, planning, and zoning activities of the Planning Board and Planning Department during Fiscal Year 2008. In FY 08, the Planning Department also provided principal staff support for the Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Historical Commission, Town/Commercial Relations Committee, Comprehensive Planning Committee, and Redevelopment Authority — see also those bodies' annual reports for FY 08.

CURRENT PLANNING

As in previous years, development issues, permit applications, and Master Plan efforts occupied much of the time of the Board and Department during FY 08

Table 1 provides a statistical review of the Department's activities, including the various permits it oversees, and zoning and other regulatory changes.

Table 1
Planning Board
Land Use & Zoning Activity

A.	<u>Review & Action</u>	<u># of Applications</u>
1.	Planning Board Special Permits	0
2.	Form A (Approval Not Required) Subdivisions	11
3.	Cluster Subdivision	1
4.	Standard Subdivision	0
5.	Subdivision Amendments	2
6.	Subdivision Lot Releases	9
7.	Subdivision/Site Plan Escrow Releases	0
8.	Street Name Changes	0
9.	Development Authorization Requests	1
10.	Site Plan Review Requests	7
11.	Sign Plans Approved	2
12.	Lighting Plans Approved	0
13.	Landscape Plans Approved	2
14.	Scenic Road Requests	0
15.	Ch. 61 Removal Requests	1
16.	Ch. 61A Removal Requests	4

B. Review & Recommendation

1.	Zoning Amendments	19
2.	Rules & Regulations Amendments	0
3.	Special Permits/Variations	35
4.	Street Acceptances	0
5.	Street Discontinuances	0

Some of the more significant planning development proposals and issues of FY 08 included the following:

Commercial/Institutional

- * New farmstand and parking area on Belchertown Road (former fairgrounds property)
- * A 3-story climate-controlled storage building at Amherst Enterprise Park on Meadow Street
- * A 2-story woodframe commercial office building at Amherst Enterprise Park on Meadow Street
- * Construction of an emergency access drive and landscape improvements for the National Yiddish Book Center off of West Street
- * Renovation by Amherst College of the historic Scott House at the corner of South Pleasant and Hitchcock Streets as part of a new office alumni development office
- * Renovation and expansion by Amherst College of the Hitchcock House residence hall on Sellen and South Prospect Streets.

Residential

- * A request to amend the conditions of the Moody Field cluster subdivision in order to waive the requirement for a cul-de-sac streetlight
- * An appearance by representatives of Hampshire College concerning a 125-unit condominium project in the ED District off West Street
- * Lot releases for home building in the Amherst Hills and Lawrence Circle subdivisions.

Zoning Issues

- * Responded to a property owner request to rezone 500 and 502 Sunderland Road from R-O and R-LD to R-VC, in order to allow better residential use of a site severely limited by wetlands. Dismissed by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting Article 18), and then defeated by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 26).
- * To amend and clarify regulations governing office development in the Professional Research Park (PRP) district and make several associated amendments. This article and a competing citizen petition article both dismissed by the regular session of the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Planning Board Article 13 & Coalition for Sustainable Neighborhoods Article 14, 11-19-07). A compromise version was adopted by a special session of the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Article 1, 11-28-07).

- * To amend the permitting requirements and standards and conditions for three use categories: research and development, light manufacturing, and manufacturing, in order to facilitate these uses. Adopted by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Articles 11 & 12).
- * To add a Research Development (R&D) Overlay District to the west side of University Drive between Amity Street and Northampton Road, in order to allow research and development uses in the B-L District in that location by right through Site Plan Review approval. Adopted by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Article 10).
- * To amend Section 5.07, permitting light manufacturing of prototypes as an accessory use to research and development use in various zoning districts. Adopted by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Article 11).
- * Responded to a citizen petition to rezone properties along South East Street south of the intersection with College Street, an ‘alternative’ response to a proposal for rezoning these properties by the Planning Board. Dismissed by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Coalition for Sustainable Neighborhoods, Article 17).
- * Added amendments to Article 4, Development Methods, of the Zoning Bylaw to make the methods for calculating residential density consistent between development methods and to allow for ‘rounding up’ in that calculation when there was a fractional result. Adopted by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 25).
- * To convert the “Municipal Parking Zone”, which existed only as language in the Zoning Bylaw, to a formal overlay zoning district (Municipal Parking District) appearing on the official Zoning Map, and adjust and modernize its regulations. Adopted by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 27).
- * To convert the two overlapping downtown jurisdictions of the Design Review Board into formal overall zoning districts appearing on the official Zoning Map, and to adjust and modernize the associated regulations. Adopted by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 28).
- * Responded to a citizen petition to adjust the regulation of residential commercial development on the basis of steep slopes. Referred to the Planning Board by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 29).
- * Responded to a citizen petition to make specific changes in the zoning in the vicinity of the Amherst Depot on Main, Dickinson, and High Streets, in an attempt to direct the nature of ongoing development of such amendments by the Planning Board. Unanimously referred back to the Planning Board by the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting (Coalition for Sustainable Neighborhoods, Article 19)
- * Responded to another citizen petition to make specific changes in the zoning in the vicinity of the Amherst Depot on Main, Dickinson, and High Streets, in an attempt to direct the nature of ongoing development of such amendments by the Planning Board. Unanimously referred back to the Planning Board by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 32).

- * Responded to a citizen petition to amend the inclusionary zoning provisions of the Zoning Bylaw to: 1) mandate that affordable units meet the state criteria for recognition on the Subsidized Housing Inventory under MGL Ch. 40B (Comprehensive Permit) in specific ways, 2) mandate accessible ‘visitability’ in new housing, 3) require the provision (or payment in lieu of provision) of recreational facilities in specific amounts for new housing, and 4) make assorted technical improvements in existing language. Elements of a compromise version developed by planning staff and the petitioner were variously or, by mutual agreement, referred back to the Planning Board by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting. More specifically, the citizen petition to amend the Inclusionary Zoning section of the Zoning Bylaw to require that affordable units provided by Inclusionary Zoning be countable under M.G.L. 40B, to require increased visitability, and to require that recreational facilities be provided in new residential development was unanimously referred to the Planning Board and Leisure Services by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 30). The Planning Board-developed alternative to Article 30, to amend the Inclusionary Zoning section of the Zoning Bylaw to accomplish goals similar to those expressed in Article 30: to require that 49% of affordable units provided by Inclusionary Zoning be countable under M.G.L. 40B, and to require increased visitability, but not including provisions regarding recreational facilities from Article 30 (with an understanding that the petitioner intended that these provisions be referred back to the Planning Board for further study), had the sections of the Article incorporating the technical changes and the 40B countability provisions adopted by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting, and to the section on visitability was referred to the Planning Board and to the Disability Access Advisory Committee by the 2008 Annual Town Meeting (Article 31).

MASTER/COMMUNITY PLANNING

Efforts continued on a number of long-range planning issues, while new issues and projects also involved the time and attention of the Board and Department.

Master Plan

See also the annual report of the Comprehensive Planning Committee.

Planning Board members and Planning Department staff assisted the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC), its Master Plan Review Subcommittee, and the consulting firm of ACP, Inc. in developing and refining the draft Master Plan document resulting from the two year Planning Amherst Together master planning process. The draft Plan was submitted by ACP, Inc. in February 2008 and the process of refinement was thereafter undertaken by the Subcommittee. At the end of FY 08, some editing and review remained to be completed, with the goal of submitting a completed draft Master Plan to the Planning Board for final review and adoption in FY 09.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

During FY 08, the Planning Department continued to work with the Community Services Department and other Town departments, boards, and committees to develop project proposals, and to prepare and review related potential CDBG projects.

Downtown

In FY 08, the Planning Department continued to be involved in numerous aspects of downtown revitalization, including parking, public open space, historical issues, and public projects.

Architect and designer Anita Licis served as the Planning Board's representative to the Design Review Board (DRB), which reviews most exterior changes in downtown buildings and sites, and on Town projects. See also the annual report of the DRB.

The multi-year streetscape redesign and reconstruction of downtown sidewalks continued. The Planning Department assisted the Department of Public Works with development of designs for new sidewalk improvements on Amity Street and the west side of North Pleasant Street between Amity Street and the St. Brigid's parsonage driveway. The Department worked with the Tree Warden, Public Shade Tree Committee and others on downtown street tree issues and the development of designs for streetscape improvements in other areas.

Housing

The Planning Department worked with the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (HP/FHC) Amherst Housing Authority (AHA), and the Community Preservation Act Committee to develop and pursue a number of projects to protect existing affordable housing units and provide for the creation of new affordable units. Pre-development analyses and examination of alternative approaches to affordable housing development at Olympia Drive continued in FY 08. Permitting issues with the Main Street project were addressed. Planning staff and the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee continued to research and further develop amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to encourage affordability in new residential development.

Historic Preservation

Using the 2005 Amherst Preservation Plan, the Historical Commission worked with Planning Department staff to develop proposals for historic preservation projects using CPA funds. The 2008 Annual Town Meeting appropriated a total of \$135,400 in CPA funds for historic preservation projects.

The Historical Commission completed an historic study of the East Village Common, as well as preliminary work on expanding the East Village National Historic Register District, working with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's historic preservation planner, Bonnie Parsons.

In FY 08, among other projects, the Planning Department and Historical Commission were involved in efforts to acquire as an historic landscape park two Main Street lots on the frontage of the historic Henry Hills mansion.

See also the annual report of the Historical Commission.

Atkins Corner

During FY 08, the Planning Department continued to work with DPW on issues involved with redesign of the intersection and road system in this proposed new village center. The Department also met with representatives of the Applewood living care community and the

condominium associations in the Hampshire Village PURD, to discuss how new village center zoning could meet the needs of those organizations.

STAFF ASSISTANCE

Planning Department staff provide professional support and technical assistance to numerous Town boards and committees, local and regional boards, as well as Amherst citizens, community groups, other communities, and others. The Town boards and committees directly served by the Planning Department in FY 08 included:

Planning Board
Zoning Subcommittee
Design Review Board
Zoning Board of Appeals
Historical Commission
Town/Commercial Relations Committee
Comprehensive Planning Committee
Redevelopment Authority
Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee
250th Anniversary Committee (Arts & Literature Subcommittee, History Subcommittee, etc.)
UMass/Hadley/Amherst economic development dialogue
UMass Campus planning effort

Other committees or bodies for whom the Planning Department provides more occasional assistance include:

- Public Transportation Committee & Bicycle Subcommittee
- Disabilities Access Advisory Committee
- Public Art Commission
- Community Preservation Act Committee
- Public Shade Tree Committee
- Greater Franklin County Economic Development Strategy Committee
- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Valley Development Council (PVPC-sponsored body)
- Summit Land Use Task Force
- Amherst Regional Chamber of Commerce

PLANNING BOARD

During FY 08, new Planning Board members Denise Barberet, Jonathan O’Keeffe, Ludmilla Pavlova-Gilham, and Susan Pynchon were appointed.

Planning Board members took advantage of training opportunities sponsored by the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and training from Town Counsel.

At the end of FY 08, the Planning Board had seven members: Aaron Hayden (Chair), Jonathan Shefftz (Vice Chair), Susan Pynchon (Clerk), Kathleen Anderson, Denise Barberet, Richard Howland, Jonathan O’Keeffe, and Eduardo Suarez, with one vacancy.

PLANNING STAFF

During FY 08, Planning Department staff members were extensively involved in public outreach, including presentations to a number of community groups. Jonathan Tucker continued to serve as Planning Director, completing his 23rd year with the Department. After eleven and a half years with the department, Senior Planner Niels la Cour resigned to take a position with the University of Massachusetts Facilities Planning office. Among other projects, Mr. la Cour had served as main staff support for the creation of an updated Master Plan from the inception of the Comprehensive Planning committee (in August 1997). Other Planning Department staff included Senior Planner Christine Brestrup, part-time Zoning Assistant Carolyn Holstein, and Management Assistant Sue Krzanowski, who completed her 20th year with the Planning Department.

During FY 08, the Planning Department Intern was Nathaniel Malloy, a graduate student at the UMass Dept. of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. Mr. Malloy was involved in many community planning projects, particularly the master planning process, and contributed significantly to improved use of the GIS computer mapping system, to the updating of permit applications and forms, and to the publication of Planning Briefs, the Department quarterly newsletter.

The vacant Associate Planner and Senior Planner positions will be filled in FY 09.

Jonathan Tucker
Planning Director